

CĂLIN TEUȚIȘAN  
COSMIN BORZA

## LITERARY HISTORY BEYOND THE NATIONAL FRAME

The current special issue gathers sixteen contributions presented at the International Literary History Congress *Local Convertible Values: International Narratives of National Literary History*, hosted by the Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Letters between May 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2018. The event was organised by the Faculty's Department of Romanian Literature, Hungarian Literature and the Department of Comparative Literature, with the support of the "Sextil Pușcariu" Institute of Linguistics and Literary History, the Cluj-Napoca branch of the Romanian Academy, as well as the universities belonging to the *Universitaria* Consortium. The congress aimed at opening a debate platform on the historicity of the literary sphere, a space which would allow literary studies to connect to other fields regarding the historical nature of social realities (history, anthropology, sociology etc), as well as to investigate them in the broader context of regional literary cultures.

The most heated debates following the congress focused on the relationship between the nation and literary history, especially because – against a backdrop of accelerating Globalization and the ever-diversifying theories and methodologies within *World Literature* – both concepts underwent significant mutations during recent decades. In the critical discourse of the field's most reputed researchers, the vantage point on the "nation" has shifted from a tendency towards studying it within strictly defined geographical boundaries (and implicitly within ethnic and racial categories) to the concession of isolating networks of transcultural phenomena, territorial crossings or multilingual interferences. As a consequence, literary histories themselves could no longer be shaped after the ethnocentric model of "epical synthesis" fuelled by 19<sup>th</sup> century values and worldviews. Historiographical approaches aimed at establishing national narratives about canonical authors, about referential historical data, about the most representative literary movements or – in the case of so-called "semi-peripheric" cultures – about the intersections and synchronisations with "great" and "central" cultures have been replaced by theoretical standpoints built upon debating cultural confluences, intersections and hybridizations, precisely those phenomena that eschew inquiry within the confines of a single ethnic space. Since the early 2000s, the reconfiguration of literary history beyond the nation has not only generated intense debate, but has also prompted far-reaching research projects, of which transnational literary histories with regional focus (addressing Latin America, the Iberic Peninsula and Central and Eastern Europe, respectively) have proven the most prolific. At the same time, the national literary systems' presumed homogeneity has been dismantled during recent years by the Bloomsbury Academic series

*Literatures as World Literatures*, coordinated by Thomas O. Beebee. This collection, which has hosted extensive studies on world literatures (German, Brazilian, Danish, Dutch, Romanian and American, among others), has not only led to new variations in the field of comparative literature, but also to viable approaches to contemporary literary history. Among the major aims of these studies were the rehabilitation of a broad array of phenomena, directions and literary instruments previously neglected or downright rejected by literary historiography: literatures written by ethnic minorities, by exiled or diasporic authors, literatures preceding the nation-state in its current understanding, literatures that refuse any sort of national classification, circuits of translation and export, the profoundly heterogeneous phenomena of global literature, etc.

The contributions selected for this special issue of *Dacoromania litteraria* share the theoretical premises previously mentioned and have been organized in 3 separate sections.

The first one, *Alternative scenarios to national literary histories*, comprises, on the one hand, reflections on transnational literary networks and dissemination paths, and on the other, theoretical inquiries into the methodologies and concepts that allow for a decisive detachment from the rigid formulas of traditional literary history. In the opening article, Imre József Balázs emphasizes the importance of networking intercultural exchanges, crucial for the post-war survival and proliferation of surrealism, even more so because, when regarded from a strictly national perspective, the movement could have been considered already concluded in Central and Eastern Europe. The ways in which transnational and international relations help reassess the preconceptions of national literary historiography underlie the following studies as well: Tímea Berki works with literary history studies written in Hungarian about Romanian authors and literary phenomena in the absence of a broader literary system that could be labelled as Romanian. Mihaela Mudure goes through Romanian translations and adaptations of British and American literary histories, while stressing the ideologized, political strategies put into integrating English-language literatures into local historiographical projects. Network-type structures make the object of Anamaria Omer's paper as well; her proposal seeks to substitute the linear, chronological literary history through a hypertextual structure that would allow for authors and texts belonging to the most various movements and periods to be linked according to their underlying affinities and not by historical determinism. The first section ends with Constantina Raveca Buleu and Ion Manolescu's attempts at counteracting the excessive influence of literary history centred around the aesthetic experience (disproportionately more important in smaller cultures) through the employment of methodologies borrowed from "the academic esoterism" and from cognitive sciences, respectively.

The second section, *Transcending national literary historiography*, includes polemical debates on the conceptual renewal of literary history, either by turning to scientific disciplines that would more efficiently emphasize the hybridisations and

convergences inherent to literary phenomena or by allowing for the inclusion of spaces and periods where classical historiographical perspectives show their shortcomings. Denis Mellier pleads for the reassessment of literary history, which in its renewed form should correspond to the essentially *visual* character of recent times. In doing so, the author discusses the “intermediality” lying at the heart of most literary forms and formulas. Alina Buzatu’s article elaborates a similar meta-theoretical reflection, as the author goes through recent debates on the concept of *literary genre* (debates whose approaches vary from sociological and ideological interpretations to cognitivist and digital methods) and glimpses the possibility of ultimately freeing the study of literature from its inherently essentialist and aesthetic-formalist prejudices. Transcending the rigid boundaries of classical historiography represents the concern of the three remaining essays of this section as well: Dominique Privé, departing from an inquiry into the Quebecois cultural field, argues for a revision of literary history from a multicultural perspective which, according to the author, is the only one suited to account for contemporary phenomena such as nomadism and migration. Daniela Spina employs a significantly broader conceptual spectrum when writing about the literature of the Catholic community from the Indian state of Goa during the country’s Portuguese rule, insisting on the propensity of colonized communities to adopt to and adapt the colonizer’s national historiographical pattern; Anca Crivăț writes about Saint Isidor of Seville’s writings as she illustrates the various ways in which historiographical research has been conducted even before literary history had existed as independent discipline.

A third section of this special issue, *Avatars of national narratives*, gathers several contributions that help dismantle some of the widespread myths of traditional historiography by confronting them with cultural micro-histories that had remained hidden or that had been downright rejected by academic consensus, as well as by denouncing their essentialist-mythical foundations. Ioana Alexandra Lionte, in a study building upon *World Literature* theories, evaluates the mythicized “national poet” with respect to his trans-linguistical durability as she accounts for the poet’s translations to English. In the following two papers, Diana Blaga discusses several of the Romanian 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century authors’ reflexions on gastronomy as possible ways to illustrate the evolution of the country’s “taste for modernity”, whereas Liliana Burlacu compares the attire worn by Caragiale’s characters with the garments worn by Caragiale himself in order to get a better insight into his aesthetic, existential and even ideological views. Another major myth of traditional historiography, inspiration, is analysed by Magda Wächter through interpreting the answers of a comprehensive literary inquiry from 1935. The issue closes with Cosmin Borza’s contribution, advocating for a revision of the essentialist approaches with respect to the rural world, one of the core national narratives in 20<sup>th</sup> century Romanian literary research.